DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 048 CE 047 877

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TITLE Northern Alberta's Living and Learning Expo.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Cooperative Planning; *Cooperative Programs; *Educational Opportunities; *Exhibits; Foreign Countries; *Publicity; *Radio
IDENTIFIERS *Alberta (North)

ABSTRACT

A radio program, "That's Living," on a private radio station, 930 CJCA, in Edmonton, Alberta (Canada), sponsored a cooperative project to make adults aware of adult education opportunities throughout northern Alberta. Approximately 20 educational institutions prepared booths, CJCA provided publicity, and the Minister of Adult Education funded the booths. Approximately 13,000 to 15,000 people visited the Expo in 1985. The same format was used for the second year when 53 institutions and agencies were represented. The attendance did not increase, and approximately the same population was reached. The entire radio station sponsored the event, and other, more traditional publicity outlets were used. Problem areas included competition among institutions during radio publicity, the participation policy, entertainment, and CJCA's continued participation. (YLB)

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NORTHERN ALBERTA'S LIVING AND LEARNING EXPO

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

1. A Harebrained Scheme?

The authors currently serve as co-hosts of a radio program, That's Living, aired on 930 CJCA in Edmonton from 2:05 to 3:30 p.m. every weekday. At the time of the first Living and Learning Expo in 1985, psychiatrist Dr. Carl Blashko was a co-host of the radio program, and was instrumental in planning. However the first author of this article takes primary responsibility for the original idea.

On That's Living, Dr. Paterson noted many callers, adults, concerned about loneliness, concerned about work opportunities, concerned with simply filling in their time with worthwhile activities. It occurred to him that in spite of our massive advertising campaigns, there are large numbers of adults really unaware of any of the fine opportunities in adult education throughout northern Alberta. The idea for a cooperative project, involving 930 CJCA, the Minister of Advanced Education, and all post-secondary educational organizations was born.

A meeting was held, with representatives from a number of universities, colleges, and other educational institutions. Primarily, however, the invitation list consisted of Dr. Paterson's friends, and the meeting was quite informal. To our knowledge there had never been a cooperative venture of this type, sponsored by a private radio station. Enthusiasm though, was strong. In October of 1985, we opened our doors to the public at the Convention Centre in Edmonton.

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Approximately twenty educational institutions prepared booths, CJCA provided publicity, the Minister of Advanced Education provided enough funding so that each institution could produce a booth on a cost plus basis. The enthusiasm of the public exceeded everybody's wildest imagination. It was estimated that approximately 13,000 to 15,000 people visited our Expo in 1985, and plans were laid for the following years.

2. Expo Itself

It couldn't have happened without the strong support of the adult education community. Wally Romanko of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology took charge of the facilities committee for the first Expo, and co-coordinated the second one. Other key players in the drama included Dr. Harry Lutzer from Concordia College, Jay Fisher from Westerra Institute, John Fisher and June Morgan from Advanced Education, Karen Jacob from Grant MacEwan Community College, Joe Daniel from the University of Alberta, Rick Lewis from CJCA and many many more. However the guiding light and the person who took the biggest risk was undoubtedly Bob Lang, Program Director of 930 CJCA. It is absolutely within the bounds of reason to expect that this thing could have been "a major flop", seriously affecting the prestige of this popular private media outlet. CJCA publicized the first Expo, to the extent of having programs on adult education every single day the Monday to Friday prior to the actual event. The radio station broadcast live from the Expo which was held on a Sunday, open from 1:00 p.m. through approximately 7:30 p.m.

Because it worked, the format was not changed very much for the second year. There was entertainment every hour in an auditorium

adjacent to the actual Expo. For the first year entertainment was provided by participating institutions, the second year we tried to find separate entertainment, so we were not publicizing some institutions and not others. Once the success of this endeavor had become established, there was absolutely no problem in putting it together for the second year. There were fifty three institutions or agencies with seventy one booths for the second year, in October 1986. The authors believe only one college in Alberta was not represented the second year, and enthusiastic support was received from everybody. One small problem, the numbers of people attending Expo did not increase the second year, we estimate that we reached approximately the same population.

Some changes were made in format though. The second year Jay Fisher of Westerra handled the publicity, and it was decided to have the event sponsored, not by the radio program That's Living, but the entire radio station, so spots were heard all day and night. Other publicity outlets in a more traditional vein, were utilized the second time. The Minister of Advanced Education was again involved, but the second year the Department also provided direct assistance, involving Further Education Councils throughout northern Alberta.

People came to our Expo. They seemed to have a good time, the radio station was impressed by the numbers, it could become an annual event.

3. Reaching the Unreached

Did this Expo, co-sponsored by the media, attract people that otherwise would be unaware of adult education opportunities? To be honest we're not sure. At the present time Joe Daniel from the

Registrar's Office of the University of Alberta is collating data from forms we received at the Expo, to find out if people really changed their habits and became more involved in adult education as a result of this endeavor. The authors understandably believe that this is a viable approach. We have indeed reached many people that otherwise would have been unaware of educational opportunities. We have yet to prove this, and perhaps this can become the focus for a further article.

4. Problem Areas

Were there problems with the Living and Learning Expo in either or both years? Of course there were. The first year, we attempted to involve every institution on the radio during That's Living. This came close to being a disaster, as many representatives were actually counting the number of times their institution was mentioned, compared to others. It became a competition. Dr. Carl Blashko capably served as referee and tried to get as many people involved as possible. The authors of this article hosted shows as best they could, but the second year we talked about concepts, not institutions, and everyone was happier.

Should you combine private and public post-secondary institutions in an Expo such as this? Should the Expo operate on a "Buyer Beware" policy? These questions have yet to be solved. Our policy for the second Expo was that members of two associations, Edmonton Liaison Association of Alberta and Edmonton Association for Continuing Education and Recreation would be invited to participate. Later we added Further Education Councils to this invitation list. What then of private colleges and agencies not members of these two

associations? They were allowed to participate, but on a first come first serve basis, as our space was sold out quickly in 1986. We're not sure if this is totally fair, and we're also not sure whether including private and public institutions is a good idea, particularly when we are being funded by a radio station and the provincial government, primarily on a no-profit basis. This will be a tricky issue for next years' organizing committee, if the Expo continues.

Entertainment is also a difficult question. There was no money to pay entertainers, so we were dependent on volunteer assistance, making the entertainment portion of the Expo somewhat uneven at best. Naturally all of the organizers and participants were delighted that people would donate time and effort to this project, but it will continue to be a problem area unless we can provide a suitable budget to attract the exact type of entertainment we feel necessary.

There are many other problems, such as CJCA's continued participation, right now uncertain and on a year to year basis. We have no permanent guarantee of funding from the provincial government. If this Expo is so successful in Edmonton, the question has arisen as to whether it might be a good idea to have other Expo's in say Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, rather than attempting to attract the public to only one city. Problems will continue, but with the quality of people we have attracted to our organizing committee's, if the Expo continues, these problems will be solved.

5. Research to Follow

It is hoped that readers of this publication will keep pressure

on us to publish research, to find out what members of the public actually believe happened as a result of this extravaganza. Joe Daniel is responsible, but all of the committees and participants in this years Expo are ready to assist, so we can publish, so we can know what effect we have had, so we can provide a better program for the future. Hopefully we'll be heard from again.

6. A Look to the Future

The authors are willing to continue to contribute to this idea as we are sold on the concept. Probably the future of the Living and Learning Expo rests with people like June Morgan and John Fisher from the Department of Advanced Education, people like Wally Romanko and Karen Jacob, who headed up key committees this past year, people like Bob Lang and Rick Lewis at CJCA, who will decide whether they can afford to place time and energies of people from this media outlet at the disposal of this type of project. In closing the article the authors would simply like to thank all those who contributed to both years of this Expo, as in most projects in adult education, the friendships gained from working together have made the project very worthwhile, regardless of pending research results. We tried a new idea and frankly we're glad we did.